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8-Ball

The rules of the game

The world 8-ball rules in plain English, for players, halls and tournaments across Kenya.





START HERE

The game in one minute

8-ball is played with a white cue ball and fifteen numbered balls. One player takes the solids, the other takes the stripes. Pocket all seven of your group, then pocket the 8-ball in the pocket you called to win the rack.



Solids, 1 to 7. One player's group.



Stripes, 9 to 15. The other player's group.



The 8-ball. Only played after your group is cleared.
Pocket it to win.



The cue ball. The only ball you strike with the cue.

1

Lag

Both players send a ball to the far cushion and back. Closest to the near cushion chooses who breaks.

2

Break

Break from the kitchen. Nothing needs to be called on the break.

3

Open table

Call a ball before each shot. Pocket your called ball and that group is yours.

4

Clear your group

Keep shooting while you pocket the balls you call. Miss or foul and your turn ends.

8

Sink the 8

Call the pocket. Pocket the 8-ball there without a foul to win.

Know these before you play

Where casual games often differ from the world rules

1 Call every shot

Not just the 8-ball. Before each shot (except the break) name the ball, and the pocket if it isn't obvious.

3 8-ball on the break: no win, no loss

The breaker chooses to spot the 8-ball and play on, or to break again.

5 Balls knocked off the table stay off

It's a foul, and the ball is not put back. Only the 8-ball is ever spotted, and only on the break.

7 A lucky ball doesn't keep you at the table

If your called ball misses but another ball drops, it's not a foul, but your turn ends.

2 Groups come from a called ball

Your group is decided by the first ball you call and legally pocket after the break, not by the break.

4 Ball in hand means anywhere

After a foul, your opponent places the cue ball anywhere on the table. Only break fouls restrict it to the kitchen.

6 You can play a safety

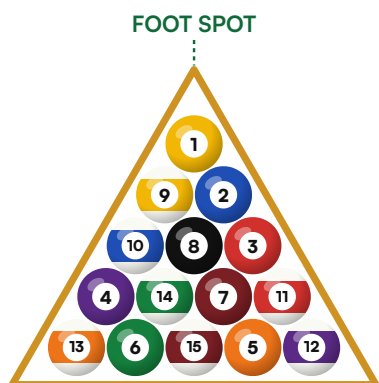
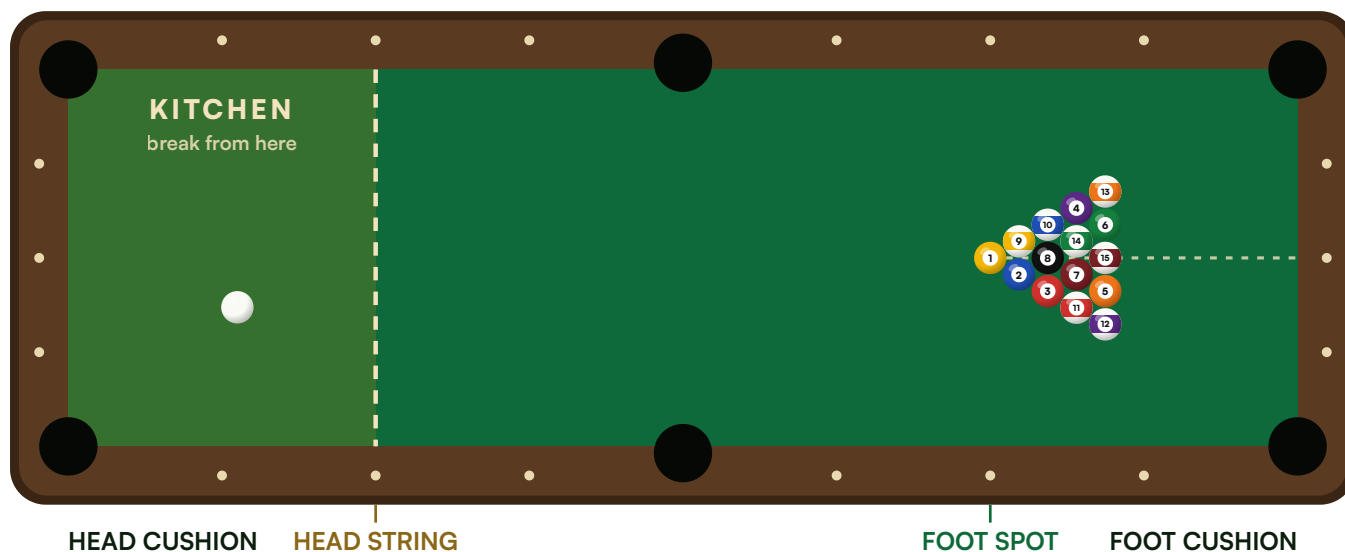
Call "safety" before the shot. Any ball you pocket stays down and your turn ends.

8 No three-foul rule

In 8-ball, three fouls in a row does not lose the rack.

SET-UP

The table and the rack



Apex on the foot spot • 8-ball in the middle

● Racking

- Rack the 15 balls as tightly as possible, with the **apex ball on the foot spot**.
- The **8-ball goes in the middle of the third row**, directly behind the apex ball.
- **One solid and one stripe** go in the two back corners.
- Every other ball goes in any order. Don't arrange them in a pattern.

● The lag: who breaks first

- Each player places a ball near the head string, one on each side, and both shoot at about the same time.
- Each ball must touch the foot cushion once and come back. The ball that stops **closest to the head cushion** wins.
- The winner chooses who breaks. After that, players **take turns** to break.
- A lag loses if the ball is pocketed, touches a side cushion, crosses to the other player's side or hits the foot cushion twice.

● Allowed equipment

- Switching cues during a match (break, jump and playing cues) and cue extensions.
- Your own chalk, as long as its colour suits the cloth. Chalk can't be used as an aiming marker.
- Up to two mechanical bridges.
- Gloves, and powder in reasonable amounts.



THE BREAK

Breaking the rack

The cue ball starts in hand in the **kitchen**. Nothing is called on the break, and the cue ball may hit any ball first. To be legal, the break must **pocket a ball** or drive **at least four balls to a rail**.

ON THE BREAK, IF...	THEN
A ball is pocketed and there's no foul	LEGAL The breaker keeps shooting. The table is still open.
Nothing is pocketed, but at least 4 balls hit a rail	LEGAL The turn passes to the opponent.
Nothing is pocketed and fewer than 4 balls hit a rail	OPPONENT CHOOSES play the table as it is, re-rack and break, or re-rack and make the breaker break again.
The 8-ball is pocketed, with no foul	BREAKER CHOOSES spot the 8-ball and play on with the balls as they lie, or break again.
The 8-ball is pocketed on a foul (e.g. a scratch)	OPPONENT CHOOSES spot the 8-ball and take ball in hand in the kitchen, or break again.
A ball is knocked off the table	FOUL Those balls stay out, but the 8-ball is spotted. The opponent plays the table as it is, or takes ball in hand in the kitchen.
The cue ball is scratched, or any other foul	FOUL The opponent plays the table as it is, or takes ball in hand in the kitchen.

● Ball in hand in the kitchen

- Place the cue ball **behind the head string**. Playing it from on or past the line is a foul.
- If the first ball you hit is also in the kitchen, the cue ball must **cross the head string first**, or it's a foul.
- If all your balls are in the kitchen, you may ask for the one nearest the head string to be spotted.

● Ball in hand anywhere

After any foul during the rack, the incoming player places the cue ball **anywhere on the table**. You may keep adjusting it, by hand or with the cue (but not with a forward stroke), until you take your shot.

PLAYING THE RACK

Open table, calling shots and your turn

After the break, every shot is a called shot. You stay at the table for as long as the balls you call go where you said.

● The open table

Straight after the break, nobody has a group yet: the table is **open**.

- Before each shot, **call the ball** you mean to pocket.
- You may hit any solid or stripe first, but **not the 8-ball**. Hitting the 8 first is a foul.
- Pocket your called ball legally and **that group is yours**. Your opponent gets the other group.
- Miss the called ball and the table stays open. Your turn ends.

Rare case: if one whole group has been pocketed while the table is still open, you may claim that group and play the 8-ball.

● Your turn at the table

- Once groups are set, **every ball you call must be from your group**. When your group is cleared, the 8-ball is the only ball you can call.
- **Keep shooting** for as long as you legally pocket the balls you call.
- If your called ball drops, anything else that drops on that shot stays down, including your opponent's balls.
- If your called ball misses but another ball drops, it's **not a foul**. The ball stays down and your turn ends.
- Your turn also ends when you miss, foul or play a safety.

● Calling your shot

- Name the **ball** and the **pocket**, unless both are obvious.
- Always call banks, combinations and kicks. When in doubt, call it.
- Only the result counts: the called ball in the called pocket. Cushions, kisses and other balls don't matter.
- Call one ball per shot. Your opponent may ask what you're playing.

"Five, corner pocket off the side cushion."

Clear call for a bank shot.

A straight-in shot to the only pocket in line doesn't need a word.

● Playing a safety

Say **"safety"** before the shot. Your turn ends when the balls stop, even if you pocket a ball. Any ball pocketed on a safety **stays down**. You must still hit your own ball first and send a ball to a rail.

● Is it pocketed?

- A ball that bounces back out of a pocket is **not** pocketed.
- A ball that hangs on the lip for 5 seconds and then drops by itself is put back where it was.
- Think the cue ball is touching a ball (frozen)? Get it confirmed **before** you shoot.

FOULS

What counts as a foul

Ball in hand ANYWHERE

The penalty for every standard foul

Your turn ends and your opponent places the cue ball anywhere on the table. Fouls on the break are different (see page 4). Fouls with the 8-ball can lose you the rack (see page 7).

- 1 Scratch**
The cue ball goes into a pocket or off the table.
- 2 Wrong ball first**
The cue ball first hits a ball that isn't in your group (or the 8-ball on an open table). If it's too close to tell, the legal ball is taken as hit first.
- 3 No rail after contact**
No ball is pocketed, and after the cue ball hits a ball, no ball (cue ball or object ball) reaches a cushion.
- 4 No foot on the floor**
At least one foot must be touching the floor when the tip hits the cue ball.
- 5 Ball off the table**
An object ball is knocked off the table. It stays out. (The 8-ball off the table loses the rack.)
- 6 Touching a ball**
Moving or touching any ball with your hand, cue, clothes, hair, chalk or bridge. The only exception is the cue ball when you have ball in hand.
- 7 Double hit**
The tip hits the cue ball twice, or is still on it when it hits a ball close by. Shooting into a ball the cue ball is frozen to is allowed.
- 8 Push shot**
Keeping the tip on the cue ball longer than in a normal stroke.
- 9 Balls still moving**
Shooting before every ball has stopped rolling and spinning.
- 10 Bad cue ball placement**
With ball in hand in the kitchen, shooting from on or past the head string.
- 11 Bad play from the kitchen**
With ball in hand in the kitchen, hitting a ball in the kitchen before the cue ball has crossed the head string.
- 12 Playing out of turn**
Shooting when it isn't your turn. Play carries on from where the balls stopped.
- 13 Slow play**
Going over the shot clock once the referee has put one on the match.
- 14 Rack template**
A ball touches a rack template (sheet) left lying on the rail.

Call it straight away

A foul that isn't called before the next shot starts is treated as if it never happened.

One penalty per shot

If several fouls happen on the same shot, only the most serious one is applied.

Jumps and miscues

A legal jump is played by driving the cue ball down into the cloth. Scooping under the ball counts as a miscue.

THE FINISH

Winning and losing the rack

HOW TO WIN

Clear your group, then sink the 8.

Pocket all seven balls in your group, call a pocket for the 8-ball, and pocket it there on a shot with no foul.



You lose the rack if you...



Pocket the 8 and foul

For example, the cue ball follows the 8-ball into a pocket.



Pocket the 8 too early

The 8-ball drops while balls from your group are still on the table.



Pocket the 8 in the wrong pocket

It goes into any pocket other than the one you called.



Knock the 8 off the table

At any point in the rack, on your shot.

Not on the break. None of these apply to the break shot. See page 4 for what happens when the 8-ball goes down on the break.

Stalemate

If neither player is making progress, the referee gives each player **three more turns**. Still no progress? **The player who broke that rack breaks again.** Players can agree to skip the three turns.

Conceding and disputes

- A player who concedes **loses the match**. Unscrewing your cue during your opponent's deciding rack counts as conceding.
- The referee's judgement calls are final. If you think a rule was applied wrongly, ask for the appeals official.

Unsportsmanlike conduct

Deliberate behaviour that stops the game being played fairly, including:

- distracting your opponent
- moving balls other than by playing a shot, or miscueing on purpose
- playing on after a foul is called or play is stopped
- practising during a match, marking the table, delaying the game or misusing equipment

The referee sets the penalty, from a **warning** to **losing the rack or match**, or removal from the event.

Glossary

Apex ball

The front ball of the rack, sitting on the foot spot.

Break

The opening shot of a rack, played from the kitchen into the racked balls.

Foot spot

The spot where the apex ball sits, a quarter of the table from the far end.

Group

Your seven balls: solids (1—7) or stripes (9—15).

Kitchen

The area between the head string and the head cushion, where you break from. The WPA rules call it "above the head string".

Open table

After the break and before groups are decided.

Safety

A called defensive shot. Your turn ends after it, and balls pocketed stay down.

Spotting

Putting a ball back on the foot spot. In 8-ball, only the 8-ball on the break.

Ball in hand

You may place the cue ball anywhere on the table before shooting.

Called shot

Naming the ball, and the pocket if it isn't obvious, before you shoot.

Frozen

A ball touching another ball or a cushion.

Head string

The imaginary line across the table a quarter of the way from the breaking end.

Lag

Both players shoot a ball to the far cushion and back. The ball closest to the near cushion wins.

Rack

One game from break to 8-ball. Also the triangle, and the set of balls in it.

Scratch

The cue ball going into a pocket.

Stalemate

Neither player can make progress. The rack is broken again.

Playing at a hall in Kenya

These are the world rules used in tournaments. Casual games in many halls use house rules instead, so **agree the rules with your opponent before the first break**. Common house rules:

- The 8-ball on the break wins, or forces a re-rack
- Only the 8-ball has to be called
- The first ball pocketed after the break decides groups
- Two shots (two visits) after a foul instead of ball in hand

Find a hall. Play a match.
billiardkenya.com

A plain-English guide based on the World Pool-Billiard Association (WPA) Rules of Play, effective 15 September 2025 (wpapool.com), sections 1—4 and 8-Ball. Where this guide and the official WPA text differ, the WPA text applies. Tournament organisers may add their own regulations. © Billiard Kenya.



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